

## **An Overview of the Benefits of Becoming a**



## Virginia Voluntary Protection Program (VPP) Overview

### What is the Virginia Voluntary Protection Program?

**The Virginia Voluntary Protection Program (VPP) is designed to recognize and promote exceptional safety and health management programs. In VPP, the Department of Labor and Industry's Occupational Safety and Health Program (VOSH), management and labor, establish a cooperative relationship at a general industry or public sector workplace that has implemented a strong program.**

- Management agrees to operate an effective program that meets an established set of criteria.
- Employees agree to participate in the program and work with management to ensure a safe and healthful workplace.
- VOSH verifies that the program meets VPP criteria, publicly recognizes the site's exemplary program, and removes the site from the programmed compliance inspections.
- VOSH also reassesses periodically to confirm that the site continues to meet VPP criteria.
- The VPP concept recognizes that enforcement alone can never fully achieve the objectives of the Occupational Safety and Health Act. Good safety management programs that go beyond VOSH standards can protect workers more effectively than simple compliance.
- VPP participants are a select group of facilities that have designed and implemented outstanding safety and health programs.
- STAR participants meet all VPP requirements. MERIT participants have demonstrated the potential and willingness to achieve STAR program status, and are implementing planned steps to fully meet all STAR requirements.

*Note: VOSH will continue to investigate valid, formal employee safety and health complaints, significant chemical spills and leaks, and all fatalities and catastrophes.*

## What Are the Benefits?

### **The following benefits have been cited by Voluntary Protection Program participants:**

- Improved employee motivation to work safely, leading to better quality and productivity
- Reduced workers' compensation costs
- Recognition in the community
- Improvement of programs that are already good, through the internal and external review that is part of the VPP application process
- Reduction of lost workday injuries by 60 to 80 percent of what would be expected of an average site of the same size in the same industry.

*Won't this just make me  
do a lot of paperwork without  
making my program better?*

The VPP application process is designed to be rigorous, to assure that only the best programs qualify. But reviewers don't look for a single correct way to meet VPP requirements. They want to see a system that works for you. Many successful programs involve considerable written documentation, while others do not.

There is some paperwork required in the application process, but applicants may use as much existing material as possible. The VPP coordinator can help you with questions about what might be required.

*Will my program qualify?*

A self-assessment checklist is included in this information kit. Use the checklist to see if your program meets VPP criteria.

*How do I apply?*

You must submit a written application to the Virginia Department of Labor and Industry, Voluntary Protection Program. The application guidelines are included in the VPP information kit. After your written application and all necessary documents have been reviewed, an onsite review will be scheduled.

*Where can I get more information?*

The Virginia Voluntary Protection Program coordinator can help you with any questions you have about self-assessment, the application, or other VPP matters.

The VPP coordinator can also refer you to other participants in the state so you can contact them about their experience.

## The Onsite Review

### *Why does VOSH need to come to my site?*

VOSH must verify that your safety and health program, as detailed in your VPP application, is fully operational and addresses all potential hazards at the site.

### *Who comes on a VPP onsite review?*

The review will be arranged at the mutual convenience of all parties concerned. The review team will consist of a team leader, plus safety and health specialists as required by the size of the site and the complexity of the safety and health program.

### *How long will the team stay?*

The time required for the pre-approval review will depend upon the size of the site. Reviews average 2-4 days onsite, unless the site has complicating factors.

### *Do I have to wait until the end of the review to find out what my chances of being approved are?*

If, at the conclusion of the pre-approval review, the applicant needs to take actions to meet one or more of the requirements for approval, reasonable time (up to 90 days) will be allowed for those actions to be taken before a recommendation is made to the Commissioner of the Department of Labor and Industry. Where necessary, an onsite visit will be made to verify the actions taken after the pre-approval review visit.

If, in the opinion of the pre-approval review team, the applicant has met the requirements of VPP, the team's recommendation will be made to the Director of Cooperative Programs, who, on concurrence, will recommend approval to the Commissioner of Labor and Industry.

### *What will the team be doing while it's onsite?*

The team performs a review that includes several steps:

- Initial meeting
- Document review
- Walkthrough
- Formal interviews
- Closing meeting

### **Initial Meeting**

The team will hold a brief introductory meeting with you and your key people. Any company representatives who may be called upon to assist the team should be in attendance. Employees who are accountable for meeting or maintaining VPP requirements should also attend.

The team leader will describe the VPP approach and what the team expects to accomplish.

You will have the opportunity to point out special accomplishments that may not be a part of the application.

### **Document Review**

Onsite document review will include the following records (or samples of them) if they exist and are relevant to the application or the safety and health program.

- Written safety and health programs
- Management statement of commitment to safety and health
- The OSHA 300 log and the 300A Summary for the site and for all applicable contractor employees on the site, with appropriate back-up documentation
- Safety and health manual(s)
- Safety rules, emergency procedures, and examples of safe work procedures
- The system for enforcing safety rules

## Virginia VPP Overview (Cont.)

- Reports from employees of safety and health problems and documentation of the responses
- Self-inspection procedures, reports, and correction tracking
- Accident incident investigation reports
- Safety and health committee minutes
- Employee orientation and safety training programs and attendance records
- Industrial hygiene monitoring records
- Annual safety and health program evaluations and site and/or corporate audits, including the documented follow-up activities, for at least the last three years
- Preventive maintenance program
- Line supervision accountability documentation
- Contractor safety and health program(s)
- Other records that provide relevant documentation of qualifications.

### Walkthrough

The review team will walk through the facility to assure that the program is fully operational.

They will also be assessing the adequacy of the program to handle potential hazards. If the team notes any significant hazards during the walkthrough, you will be asked to correct the problem.

The team will have brief, informal interviews with randomly selected employees. The talks will be held near employee workstations so interruption of work can be avoided.

*What will happen if the team sees an apparent violation of VOSH standards?*

The Virginia VPP review team will be looking for evidence that your program is creating and maintaining safe and healthful working conditions. Any hazards they may observe will serve as indicators that some aspect of your program may need improvement.

While they won't issue citations, as safety and health professionals, they would not be expected to ignore hazards. They will work with you to determine how and when to correct any hazards they see, and if corrections require more time than the onsite review allows, they will ask to be notified when the corrections have been completed.

### Formal Interviews

Formal interviews will be requested with a small number of your employees. These interviews will help to validate employee awareness of and participation in the overall safety and health program.

Each formal interview should last about 20 minutes and will be scheduled with the consent of management.

A private space will be requested for these interviews. All questions asked will relate to the site safety and health program.

Experience with interviews to date has been positive and has reflected well on local management.